

God's University

Course for Angels



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Thrust Statement: The angels of God desired to stoop low and look into the mystery of redemption in Christ.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:8-13; 1 Peter 1:10-12.

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Ephesians 3:8-11**).^[1]

When you reflect upon redemption are you thrilled with joy? Are you as interested in knowing about this mystery that for ages was hidden in God? Even before the creation of the world, this enigma of atonement for sins was out of sight in God (**Ephesians 1:4-10**). This secret of deliverance about God's way of justification for sinful man was not fully revealed until Christ came. The great question was: How could God be just and at the same time justify sinful man? The prophets wondered and searched diligently about this great event; even the angels desired to stoop low and observe this feat on the part of their Creator (**1 Peter 1:10-12**). This is the subject of Paul's words of exhortation to the Ephesians (**1:4-10**). It was through the church that God revealed His manifold wisdom in bringing about salvation for the unrighteous.

THE CHURCH AND ANGELS

Paul was called to proclaim or make plain the mystery of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (**Ephesians 3:8-9**). In **verse 9**, Paul begins his comments about this mystery and concludes his observation with **verse 11**: “according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul’s calling and ministry to the Gentiles involves his explaining God’s methodology of redemption for the human race. Through the Gospel message, Paul calls attention to the fact that the Christians at Ephesus are a part of the church through whom the “rulers and authorities in heavenly places” are instructed. It is apparent that the apostle is calling attention to the staggering and astounding truth that “rulers and authorities” are the heavenly angels.

Before proceeding with the words of Paul in Ephesians, perhaps it would help to call attention to another witness—the apostle Peter. Peter calls attention to the wonder of this salvation by saying,

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **Even angels long to look into these things (1 Peter 1:10-12).**

The richness of this salvation is so great that even the angels desire to bend low and look into the marvels of this redemption on the part of Christ. Listen again to the words of Paul as he expresses this basic sentiment: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (**Ephesians 3:10**). Kenneth S. Wuest, former teacher of New Testament Greek at the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, captured the significance of the Greek preposition “by” (through), when he wrote: “The word “by” is from a Greek preposition which speaks of intermediate agency. It is through the agency of the Church that the holy angels are learning the manifold wisdom of God.”^[2] Once more, Wuest says, correctly in my view, that

The angels have been contemplating the majesty and the glory of the Godhead all those years, and yet have not learned some things regarding their Creator which the Church can teach them. Peter in his first epistle (1:12) tells us what those things are which “the angels passionately desire to bend low and look into.” The angels never had a conception of the love, the grace, the humility, the self-sacrifice of God until they saw it in the Church. There they see Calvary where the Creator died, the Just for the unjust. There they see the incarnation where the Creator took to Himself the form and limitation of a created being. There they see the power of God in transforming a sinful human being into the image of God’s dear Son, manifestation of power far greater than that which operated in the creation of the universe. God spoke a universe into being by uttering a word. It took Calvary to make possible the Church.^[3]

Paul is asserting that what is happening in the Church is so stupendous and so

glorious that even the angels, as it were, staggered at the “manifold wisdom of God.” They were utterly amazed at what they saw “in and through” the Church. This is why Peter could say, “Even angels long to look into these things” ([1 Peter 1:12](#)). God created these angels; they were in the very presence of God, but according to Paul they had never thought of or even imagined such grace, such love, and such forgiveness. The Gospel of God surpasses even their knowledge and their comprehension. Paul’s statement is that this in-depth knowledge about their Creator comes through the Church, that is to say, through us ([Ephesians 3:10](#)).

Christians are given a portrayal of the Church in her dignity and greatness and glory. The Church consists of people who have been redeemed. Christians are people who have been delivered from the wrath of God. Christians are people who have been delivered from the dominion of sin. Christians are people who have been set free from the curse of the Law. Christians are people who are no longer under condemnation. No wonder the angels of God desired to bend low and look into this great mystery. Are you amazed? If not, why not? Are you thankful for this “great salvation” ([Hebrews 2:3](#)) that even the prophets and angels were interested in? This mystery of expiation is what Paul calls attention to earlier in his letter to the Ephesians.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do ([Ephesians 2:1-10](#)).

This salvation of God is accomplished “in and through” Christ. This rescue from condemnation is the greatest manifestation of the wisdom of God. When one speaks of the “wisdom of God,” perhaps one can say that wisdom is an attribute of God in which He arranges His purposes and plans to accomplish His goals. In other words, God arranges the means by which He brings forth the results of His purpose. One might also say that wisdom is that faculty and quality which enables God to view a situation so that He may decide what to do in order to bring about the desired results. God not only has knowledge but He also has wisdom, that is to say, the capacity and the power to make use of His knowledge.

As one reflects back upon the subject of angels in Peter’s first epistle and Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, one realizes that even though the angels did not fully understand the wisdom of God in His quest for fallen man, yet they began to see God’s purpose unfolding before their own eyes in His calling sinners to repentance through Jesus His Son. Thus, through the Church the angels witnessed God revealing His great wisdom. The angels had seen the children of Israel going down into Egypt and eventually becoming

slaves. They saw how God smote the Egyptians and saved the Israelites. They also observed the subsequent history of Israel which included their captivity in Babylon in 586 BC. Even six hundred years before Moses, the angels also witnessed God's calling Abraham out of Ur of Chaldea. Yes, the angels even witnessed the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. But, in spite of all these events, Paul is saying that it was not through all these events in history that they learned about the manifold wisdom of God, but rather that it was through the Church.

For Paul, the wisdom of God was made known through the results of the message of redemption entrusted to him. It is especially the message of the Gospel of Christ that these "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" understand the "manifold wisdom of God." It is here that the kaleidoscopic, the variegated character, the great varieties of colors in God's wisdom appears. Surely the angels knew the essence of God's wisdom. But here in the Church is the full bloom in all its glory. In other words, the apostle's argument is that the angels have been brought to see God's wisdom in a way that they had never imagined. There were hidden glories in the Gospel of which they knew nothing, even though they had always lived in the presence of God.

The angels, through the Church, saw His justice, His righteousness, His holiness, His truth, His eternal glory, and His unchangeableness. In the Roman letter, Paul addresses the necessity of atonement for the redemption of God's creatures. This means of deliverance in and through Christ upholds the mercy and justice of God. How could God be just and, at the same time, the justifier of sinful man. Paul captures the totality of the dilemma that God faced through the words of the Holy Spirit:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

JESUS IS GOD'S WAY OF DELIVERANCE FROM DESTRUCTION

Do you want to escape the wrath of God? Do you want to shun the dominion of sin? Do you want release from the curse of the Law? Do you want to elude condemnation? Paul gives the answer in the Book of Romans:

Freedom From God's Wrath

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring

Freedom From the Dominion of Sin

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal

eternal life **through** Jesus Christ our Lord (**5:20-21**).

Freedom From the Curse of the Law

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—**through** Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (**7:24-25**).

life **in** Christ Jesus our Lord (**6:22-23**).

Freedom From Condemnation

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is **in** Christ Jesus our Lord (**8:38-39**).

CONCLUSION

Lloyd-Jones points out that “We rob God of His glory if we imagine that forgiveness and salvation are simple and easy.”^[4] Through the cross, Jesus brought both Jew and Gentile together. In Romans Chapter 5, it is “through” Jesus our Lord; in Chapter 6, it is “in” Christ Jesus our Lord; in Chapter 7, it is “through” Jesus our Lord; and in Chapter 8, it is “in” Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul is saying that our redemption is “in and through” our Lord Jesus Christ.

The very things that Paul expresses about redemption are also the things that our Lord expresses to Nicodemus.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-18**).

On another occasion, Jesus responds to some Jews who persecuted Him by saying, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (**John 5:24**). Later, Jesus responds to a crowd that followed Him: “For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (**John 6:40**). The good news is that this salvation begins with faith and ends with faith. This is that great mystery that even the angels desired to observe. Paul expresses this mystery to the Romans in a nutshell: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (**Romans 1:16-17**). Is it any wonder that Paul prays that the Ephesians will come to understand this wonder of wonders! He wants them to understand this great power of God in accomplishing this feat of justification for sinful man. Paul writes:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way ([Ephesians 1:18-23](#)).

**Message Delivered
at the Following
Congregations**

Oakwood Hills Church
DeFuniak Springs, FL
Date: 4-25-1999
Present: 71
Scripture Reading: Dennis Smith

[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] Kenneth S. Wuest, "God's University for Angels," in *Golden Nuggets in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 32.

[3] Ibid., 10-11.

[4] D. M. Lloyd-Jones, "God's Strange Design," in *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3:1 to 21* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 88. I am deeply grateful for Lloyd-Jones' comments concerning Ephesians 3:10. I would suggest that anyone who reads my sermon also read "God's Strange Design" by Lloyd-Jones, 80-92.